

* Preparing for Hunting Season / by Alan Peterson/*

As rifle hunting season quickly approaches, the San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA) reminds everyone that preparation is essential for a safe and enjoyable experience.

The SJPLC is a combined National Forest, BLM and SJMA service-first office, providing visitors with information, maps, guidebooks, OHV Registrations and agency permits for Public Lands of Southwest Colorado.

Contacting the San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC), a combined San Juan National Forest, Bureau of Land Management and SJMA visitor front desk at (970) 247-4874 is a good resource to have a lot of your questions answered, from the weather and terrain, to road quality and accessibility. Road and campground closures are also posted on www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan. The Outdoor Recreation Hotline at 970-247-8187 offers recorded updates weekly on recreation opportunities to special restrictions and closure updates.* *

Off-highway-vehicles (OHV) are a popular way to travel in the backcountry during hunting season, but do you know where you can use one? The San Juan National Forest Map sells for \$7.00 and depicts the travel management (available at www.sjma.org)

OHV registrations are also required for residents or non-residents who are not registered in their home state. Nonresidents have to bring proof of their registration with their title. The cost is \$15.25 and registrations are available at your Public Lands Offices in Durango, Bayfield, and Pagosa Springs, some local OHV dealers, as well as Navajo State Park.

Remember that firearms must be fully unloaded in both the magazine and chamber as well as fully enclosed in a hard or soft case with no open ends, when riding on an OHV. Also, firearms may not be discharged in or near a campground and must always be in plain site.

Camping outside of developed campgrounds is allowed on both National Forest and BLM lands unless otherwise posted. Please camp at least 100 feet from any source of water. You must keep vehicles within 300 feet of the roads when accessing your camp. On the San Juan National Forest and BLM lands, it is prohibited to camp for more than 28 days within a continuous 60-day period. After 14 days, you must move your camp or equipment beyond a 3-mile radius from the previous site.

Hunters who camp with stock on public lands must use State Certified Noxious Weed-free hay, straw or mulch with marked verification, steamed rolled grain, or cubed or palletized feed made from certified weed-free hay.

Each year Agency staff, SJMA staff, and volunteers come together in a tent outside of the Colorado Division of Wildlife office in Durango to provide public land information, safety tips in the backcountry, camping and road updates and sell Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) registrations, maps and guidebooks to encourage prepared and safe hunting practices in the backcountry. Look for us outside the DOW office on October 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, and November 2 and 3.

According to CDOW Area Wildlife Manager Pat Dorsey, “Hunters get good information at the booth on where to camp, LNT camping, weed-free hay requirements, trail closures and more. I am convinced that more-educated hunters are better hunters. And, I don’t think that many drive the miles they do to get to our beautiful state to intentionally break the law.”

Eyes in the Forest Hotline continues again this year during rifle hunting season to encourage safety in the backcountry and to encourage everyone to protect their public lands. Just phone 385-1234 for a 24-hour recording where you can leave a message.

Wallet-sized Hunting Date Cards are available at all of our Public Land offices on the San Juan National Forest that offer hunting season dates, allowing recreationists and other public land multiple users to be familiar with dates that they should wear 500 square inches of blaze-orange.